

# CFP National Championship: Miami vs Indiana

Saturday, January 17, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

**Miami Hurricanes**

**Wesley Bissainthe**

Pregame Press Conference

**Q. Wes, you played against Mendoza and Cal last year. What did you see from him against Cal and then what have you seen from him over the course of this week?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Mendoza's a great player. He's a great football player. He's smart. He's mobile, and he gets his job done for his team.

**Q. He said he remembers last year when you knocked him out. What do you remember about that play. Can you take us through that one?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Was it the last quarter? I think it was the last quarter, we were down by, what, a touchdown, and they were driving the ball. And I just remember dropping back in the coverage, and I told myself in my head, if he run, I'm going to make him pay for it.

So he just took off. And I took off, too. And I just -- everything, it just happened.

**Q. Wesley, you're one of the few players on this team who have been here since Mario Cristobal's first year in 2022. How have you seen the overall culture and buy in grow from year one and now to the championship in year four?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: When Mario first got here, he had a vision. And I just wanted to be a part of it. I came, I committed to the U. And we just went to work, put our head down and went to work and we grinded. And look where we are now.

**Q. Fernando (indiscernible) that type of quarterback where he needs he can put it down and just get going. You guys have taken on a couple of those guys already, like Trinidad a couple of weeks ago against Ole Miss. What are you seeing on your side, kind of keep him contained and keep him from extending**



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those plays just a little bit?

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Just executing the defense, just doing your job and keeping eyes on him in case he scrambles. Just doing your job. I feel like everything else will take care of itself everyone just do their job.

**Q. What are you listening to in the locker room on Monday?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Probably going to add some YoungBoy in there. Probably going to be a lot of YoungBoy being played.

**Q. Being from Miami, being in the Haitian culture, what's your favorite dish, a Haitian meal that your mom cooks or your family cooks for you?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Probably have some rice in there and probably some fried chicken. Throw some fried plantain in there.

**Q. How is this year under Coach Hetherman, how has he kept things simple for you and the defense? How does he go about implementing his read-and-react type system?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Coach Hetherman is different. The way he approaches things and the way he studies film is made for your players to succeed. You've just gotta do your job and play football and play fast and violent and physical. ESV, be excited, swarm and violence. That's what we go off every day.

**Q. Local kid, what's this been like for you knowing you're going to play a National Championship here on home turf?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: I don't have no words. It feels like a dream. Just a local kid growing up in Miami, able to play the National Championship in Miami. It's nothing else I could ask for. Something I worked my whole life for. I'm very excited for this moment.

**Q. A lot of you guys all playing with each other at**

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**Miami Central, the guys coming from American Heritage, a big group coming from the south, does this make this journey a little bit more special too that you have a lot of guys to share this with?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Most definitely. I feel like Coach Cristobal came, and the biggest thing was just keeping the Miami kids home. Why go put on for another school when you can put on for your hometown school? That was the biggest thing.

**Q. When you look at Fernando Mendoza and this offense, they don't make a lot of mistakes, but Miami has hung its hat on the fact of making teams make mistakes to get to this point right now. When those two things converge in the National Championship, just what you can say about the match-up and your defense against their offense?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Like I said, we've just got to be disciplined as well. Everyone has to do their job. Everyone has to do their one-on-one. If we do that, everything else will take care of itself. You don't want to press and make plays. Everyone has to do their job each and every play.

**Q. Indiana has one of the best rush offenses in the country. What's your plan on slowing them down?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Like I said, I believe in our D line. I feel like we have an amazing group of D linemen -- Ahmad Moten and Justin Scott and David Blay. I feel with those dogs everything will take care of itself. We just play off them.

**Q. Why is Mario Cristobal the right leader for this team at this time? Just what it means for you to have him as the central voice of the Miami Hurricanes. What is it about him that you feel is the right fit for Miami?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Coach Mario played here. It's in his blood. He came home with a vision and he knew what he wanted the Miami Hurricanes to be, and I believe in his vision, and we just put our head down, we grinded, and now we're at the National Championship.

**Q. When Coach Hetherman came in, what did you do to get to know him and his scheme, what were your early impressions of him?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: I met with Coach Hetherman a lot. I played the Mike and Will in his defense, just trying to get familiar with it and all the terms. It wasn't really that hard. You've just got to play fast and be physical. That was the biggest thing. I would meet with him every day.

Any questions I had, I would go ask Coach Hetherman. He was open to answering any questions I had.

**Q. Having played in the previous defense and been used to that system, were you nervous about a new system coming in? How much did he kind of open things up for you to have the success you've had this year?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: I wouldn't say I was really nervous. I feel like I had three different DCs in four years in college. So I wasn't really nervous. It was just a matter of just getting in the film room and learning what you've got to do because at the end of the day you can't make excuses. You've got to go out there and get it done.

**Q. Obviously unique circumstance playing a championship game in your home stadium. What's the preparation been like this week compared to what it was the previous bowl games and what's your expectation for the atmosphere on Monday?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: I don't feel like nothing has changed. We kept everything the same. You've just got to be where your feet are and attack each and every day with the right mind and right attitude, and everything takes care of itself.

**Q. For you, can you speak about the chemistry of the linebacking room and how you have all grown throughout the season and you all rotate through a lot of people nine times out of 10, but how has that relationship and just the chemistry on the field developed?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: The chemistry started off the field in the offseason, just going out with your guys, going out to eat with your guys in the room. You've gotta do that to build chemistry during the season, and I feel like that's what the whole defense has done. This whole offseason we've been meeting up for dinner and just talking about what we wanted out of this year. That's what we did. Look at how far it's gotten us.

I feel that's big, building chemistry with your defense in the offseason is real big.

**Q. You grew up here in this community probably hoping to play in this game. To get to do it, I mean, 15 minutes from your high school, can you talk to us about that, how special it is, A, to be in this game, and, B, to be doing it where you grew up?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Man, it's very special. And I feel amazing, because not only am I making the University of

Miami fans proud, but I'm making members of my community proud.

When I go back home and I go back to my high school, I get to see their faces, see their smiles, this kid's there looking up to all of us. So we're giving them a vision. One day they might go to the University of Miami and put on for their hometown and do big things like play for the National Championship.

It's all about just doing big things for the younger generation.

**Q. Does it feel like it sunk in yet that you're going to be playing in this game?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Honestly, it still feels like a dream a little bit, just how much work we put in to get to this moment. It feels unreal. But we know we put the work in to get here, so just a matter of just getting the job done.

**Q. Indiana's offense relies heavily on RPOs. How does this change your approach?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Just trusting the plan and the game plan Coach Hetherman has for us. That's all we could do. Just doing your job, like I said, that's it.

**Q. Going back to before the playoffs started when you're watching that show and people have you bunched in there with Alabama and Notre Dame, what were you thinking during that moment as you're sort of waiting to see if you got in?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: I knew if they let us in that we're going to be a dangerous team, because I know the guys that I have going to war with me.

When they let us in, we knew we had to get right, get up, get right to work. That's what we did.

**Q. A few players have mentioned like a pact from the NC State game to play one more game at the Hard Rock. Was that something that was on the team's mind the whole season, of course, the National Championship, but from Notre Dame on, getting to play one more home game?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: We definitely were talking about it in the summer. Once the season started, we didn't have too much focus on it because we knew we had a game to go by week by week and it's definitely something that was big for us and we knew that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, so we just went to work every week. And look where we are at now.

**Q. Then to kind of have that plan before like you said waiting on the committee and the decision to be able to see that through and get the one more home game, what does that mean to you and the team?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: It meant everything for us to see Miami get let in the playoffs. It meant everything. We knew that we had to make the most out of this opportunity.

**Q. Before he was at Miami, Mario had a great run coaching for Coach Saban at Alabama. Has he ever told any stories about working for Coach Saban, or what have you seen from him on that front?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: He doesn't really talk about working for Coach Saban a lot. Sometimes he does mention the things he's learned from Coach Saban and the things he took from Coach Saban, but he doesn't really talk about working for him that much.

**Q. What are some of those things?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Just the way Coach Saban goes about things. It's a trenches game. Things like that.

**Q. Last year, you were one of the team's top defensive contributors. How are you looking to carry that on in this important game today?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Just doing my job, doing anything in my ability to get this W for my team. That's all I can do.

**Q. Has there been a message in practice that your coach has been drilling in to you on the defensive end?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Just be in the moment. Be in the moment, be where your feet are, everything else will take care of itself.

**Q. Preparation-wise, what makes this Miami so special that has led you to where you guys are today?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Honestly, I feel like our chemistry. I feel like this offseason we built a bond that got us here. We knew that we had to play for each other. I feel like nobody is on the field playing for themselves. We're all playing for each other.

**Q. Their passing game is getting a lot of the attention here, but they have a really good rushing attack with three rushers over five yards per carry. What do you really see with that offensive line, how they move in the run game, what you guys can do to kind of attack**

it?

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: They have a good offensive line, but I feel like we have a great defensive line. So I feel like with our interior guys and our edge players, I feel like it will be a good match-up and it's going to be a good show to watch.

**Q. Miami's always been a place that had a lot of ex-players come through, NFL guys, or just ex-players, period. Tell me what you take from those interactions whether it's individual or as a group, when you hear Ray Lewis speak to you or Michael Irvin is there on the sideline, what's the takeaway?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Man, it's big. Especially Ray Lewis. You grow up watching them. You grow up watching his highlights before the game. Your youth football games. Just to have him come back and talk to us and speak life to us. It's no greater feeling. He's a legend here. We try our best to model our game after guys like that. It's a blessing just to have him come back and speak knowledge into us.

**Q. And what they're sharing is not so much like, here's how you can be better as a player when you're playing against this type of offense, it's more like, here's how you can be better as a team, that's kind of what your teammates said, like, big picture stuff, less small things?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Most definitely, most definitely. Just leadership stuff, leadership roles. I think this past year we had Michael Irvin speak to us. Last year we had Ray speak to us. They were telling us just play for one another. Just take it one day at a time and everything else will take care of itself.

**Q. And you're YouTubing these guys. You didn't see Ray Lewis play as a little kid. You're just YouTubing?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Yeah, everything was YouTube, yeah.

**Q. You guys played against Fernando Mendoza last year against Cal. What do you remember about that game? And specifically your late play at the end, that seemed like it could have been a targeted, could not have been. Just what you remember from that game and that moment?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: That game spoke a lot about the Miami Hurricanes. I think we were down, what, 35-10, and we were able to come back. That was huge. And we were in California. That was huge.

That last play, I was just trying to make a play for my team because I knew I didn't want to leave that game with an L. Just when he ran, I just made the decision to hit him.

Thank God I didn't get kicked out for targeting. But it was a great play. And I'm grateful that my team was able to come out with a W.

**Q. Just curious who would be on your Miami Hurricanes Mount Rushmore, the four players?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: University of Miami Football. That's a good question. I'm going to go Ray Lewis. Any side of the ball? I'm going to go Ray Lewis. Is it too early to go Malachi Toney? I'm going to throw Mali in there. Ray Lewis, Mali. I'm going to go Cam Ward. I'm going to go old school for the last one. I'm probably going to go Michael Irvin. I wanted to mix it up. I ain't just want to go straight old school. But, yeah, yes, sir.

**Q. You talked about guys like Michael Irving and Ray Lewis come in talking about leadership. What's the mental preparation that you guys go through when it comes to a game like this, being on the big stage, one win away from winning the natty?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: You just want to kind of block out all the noise. Just lock in on your preparation, take it a day at a time. Be where your feet are. We know the game's coming up. You just gotta attack each day. Win the game and just let it loose.

**Q. I heard coach talk about the defense always want to play angry, play mad. I know off the field you don't come across so angry. What's it like to kind of flip that switch when you put the helmet on?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: That's the mentality. That's what he preaches. Like I said before, ESV, excitement, swarm and violence. When you're out there, you want to be physical. I feel like that's the identity of this defense. From the DBs to the linebackers, to the linemen, be physical.

**Q. For guys like you who played at Central, guys from South Florida down here, have you sat and taken it all in? Has it hit you to be in this atmosphere in your backyard where you all grew up together and played together?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: It definitely hit me. But this is something that we work for, just something we work our whole lives for, growing up, playing the game to now. It's a big opportunity for us, especially everyone who is from Miami or Broward area. It's a big opportunity for us, and

we can't wait to make the most of it.

**Q. Tell me about the belief you guys had even before the playoff that you belonged here, you were going to get to this point. Talk about that belief everybody shared this year.**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: We definitely knew we were special. We definitely knew we were special. We had a couple minor hiccups, but we didn't let that faze us. We knew if we controlled what we control, that God would make a way, and he did. Now we're just making most of it.

**Q. The way you guys have been able to step up when guys have been hurt, whether it's a true freshman, somebody always seems to be stepping up for this team in clutch moments. Tell me about the mentality that it doesn't matter who is on the field, you're going to make the play.**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: The grit. That's the grit. I feel like we have no drop-off on our team in no position. I feel like every position group, we know that each and every one of us is special. If one person is down, next-man-up mentality. And that's the way that Coach Mario recruited.

**Q. About Mario, the way he is as a coach, the intensity, what's it been like playing for him these years and just getting to know him on that level?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Man, it's been amazing. And what this university means to him, like I say all the time, Coach Mario had a vision and I just want to be a part of it. And it was only a matter of time before that we got here with the work that we put in and, yeah.

**Q. You've been here pretty much since start to finish, right. Walk me through that process to eventually get here to the national championship game, all the highs and lows and what it feels to finally be here.**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: It feels amazing, man. We went through a lot. We went through a lot in previous years. We just kept our head down and kept grinding. Like, that's literally what we've been doing.

To get to this moment, that goes to show the work we put in and the chemistry we've built, and I knew this team was going to be special.

**Q. Being a veteran who's seen that process from start to finish, what's been your message for the younger players, the freshmen, on how to just get through the struggles, let's say, midseason with the SMU loss?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Like I just told him, we knew we just had to put our head down and control what we can control. That's all that was left to do. Just keep grinding and keep winning games, and they let us in, and we just ran with the opportunity.

**Q. I want to know, what's the message to the city? I know you're day one, hometown, what message do you want to give to the fans and the city of Miami?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Thank you, guys, for all of your support. Without y'all, I don't know where we would be. Thank you guys for the support. We love and appreciate you. And come this Monday, we need you all out there, and we need you all to be, what do they call it, the asylum, we need you all to be crazy out there for us.

**Q. Has it hit you, like, this moment is here?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Sometimes it still feels like a dream. I'm not going to lie. But you've just got to wake up and be in the moment and attack the opportunity in front of you.

**Q. We hear a lot about the front guys, obviously. We hear a lot about the back-end guys. Tell me about this linebacker corps, what makes you guys so good. I feel you're playing your best football at the right time. How has that come to be that you guys are really on your game right now as linebackers?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Our chemistry. And the way we love each other, man. We try our best to make each other better, like, we rotate a lot. So whoever goes in there, we try our best to just support each other. And that goes a long way just supporting your brother whenever he's out there on the field.

These playoffs, we knew our group had to make a leap. That's what we've been doing. We've just got to keep the train rolling. Yes, sir.

**Q. I'm asking the guys, what makes South Florida football different, in a sentence?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: In a sentence? What makes South Florida guys, I believe, is the hunger, the hunger we all have. I feel it's more of a need for us, like we just want it more in a way.

**Q. Being from Miami, being able to play in this game, what does it mean for a young Wesley?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Man, it means everything. It's something I worked my whole life for, and I'm blessed with

this opportunity and I'm grateful. Now we've just gotta finish it off and make the most of it.

**Q. Last year, at Cal, you had a huge hit versus Mendoza. Do you remember that play and how it felt, the penalty, do you remember all those emotions? Talk to us about that play and how that felt.**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: So when he took off, I knew he was running high. So I knew I was going to get a hit on him. But when they flew the flag, I was a little nervous because it could have went both ways. They could have kicked me off for targeting or they could have kept me in and we would have got the third down stop.

But I'm glad they kept me in there and we got the third down stop and we were able to win that game. So it was a big play. I'm thankful for our offense and thankful for our team, man, we came back from 35-10. So it was a great win for the University of Miami, and I'm grateful for it.

**Q. First time you saw Malachi Toney, what did you think?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: On the football field? Well, I'm going to tell you now, we all knew he was going to be special from the jump, from the first day he came out of practice. Every time we turned around, he was always open for some reason. We always knew he was going to be special.

**Q. What about the first time you saw him in the facility?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: In the facility? Like at practice or walking around?

**Q. Walking, first time you saw him.**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: He approached everything like an NFL veteran. One of the first in the building. Never late. You just knew he was going to be special just the way he approached everything, not just on the field, but off the field.

**Q. He's a strong dude, too, right?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Most definitely.

**Q. He pushed that pile into the end zone in the semifinal game, that was impressive.**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Most definitely.

**Q. You see it all the time?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: He doesn't slack off in the locker room. He approaches everything like an NFL veteran. When you do things like that, things will translate to the football field.

**Q. Game pick for you guys, Texans or Patriots?**

WESLEY BISSAINTHE: Texans.

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